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10 IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

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12 TITLE: BUSINESS METHOD FOR
13 MEMORIALIZING VEHICLE PURCHASE
14 TRANSACTIONS
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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of The Invention

The present invention relates to business methods, and business methods in the vehicle sales area in particular.

2. Background Information

The vehicle sales arena is an area in which allegations of fraud and unfair sales tactics are rampant. The combination of aggressive sales staff and often unsophisticated purchasers is a volatile combination which often leads to claims against dealerships under the states' various consumer protection statutes and regulations.

Specific sources of dealership and customer conflicts include, among other things, such things as the total cost for a vehicle, the added costs for after-market products and warranty protections, the duration and scope of manufacturer's warranties, perceived promises as to performance or features of the purchased vehicle, the affect of credit given for trade-in vehicles on the ultimate purchase price of the subject vehicle, and the requirements for enrolling in, or

1 making claims under add-on warranty programs (window etching,
2 alarm system warranties, etc.).

3 When disputes arise between dealerships and customers,
4 they often descend to the level of a "swearing match" between
5 the "big bad car dealer" and the "poor victim customer."
6 Regardless of the actual facts, and what the customer was told
7 (often times, multiple times), the dealership loses in court,
8 or at least undertakes an expensive defense with no possible
9 remedy when the truth prevails.

10 For the above reasons alone, it would be beneficial to
11 provide, not just some manner for recording the interchange
12 between sales staff and vehicle purchase customers, but to
13 provide a recording system which produces substantially
14 indelible records which are easily retrieved when needed.

15 In addition to providing protection for dealerships in
16 the legal context, such a transaction recording system will
17 enable supervisors to critique and train sales staff with
18 respect to their demeanor and presentation when dealing with
19 customers, as well as assure that all things within the staff
20 member's responsibilities are being fulfilled (the offer of
21 after-market programs and products, for example).

22 Further still, such a transaction recording system will
23 actually protect customers in many cases. The stress of a

1 major purchase, the frustration of unrealized expectations,
2 and merely the passage of time can all contribute to flawed
3 memory. A customer may well, honestly believe that one thing
4 was promised, or another was never revealed, only to find out,
5 when viewing the recorded transaction, that memory has played
6 a trick. Such a customer will then avoid the costly and
7 embarrassing experience of seeking legal relief against the
8 dealership, only to find out that there was never a case.

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10 In view of the foregoing, it would well-serve the vehicle
11 sales industry and its customers alike to provide a business
12 method and associated apparatuses which would allow the
13 recording, the substantially indelible archiving, and easily
14 operated cataloging of recorded transactions between sales
staff and customers.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In view of the foregoing, it is an object of the present invention to provide a novel business method which benefits automobile dealers and customers.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a novel business method for conducting vehicle sales transactions that involves producing substantially indelible audio and video recordings of such transactions.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a novel business method for conducting vehicle sales transactions that involves producing catalogued and easily retrieved audio and video recordings of such transactions.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a novel business method for conduction vehicle sales transactions that involves producing digitally recorded and stored audio and video recordings of such transactions for later retrieval in the event of a dispute as to what was and was not said or disclosed in the transaction.

In satisfaction of these and related objects, the present invention provides a novel business method and associated apparatus which digitally records audio and video data from vehicle sales transactions, stored such recordings on CD-R, CD-RW, DVD-R or DVD-RAM media (or its equivalent), and

1 produces catalog data associated with each transaction
2 recording which allows the recording to be readily located and
3 played at a subsequent time.

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5 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

6 The components involved in carrying out the subject
7 business method can be categorized into two major
8 classifications: hardware/equipment and proprietary software.

9 **Hardware:**

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- Wired Digital Video Camera or Wireless Digital Video Camera/Digital Video Receiver
- Audio microphone
- CD-R, CD-RW, DVD-R, or DVD-RAM drive
- Customary cables which allow for interface between hardware components, Microsoft Windows compatible personal computer with color monitor, mouse, and keyboard

18 **Software:**

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- Software program for taking cataloging data through keyboard interface, initiating recording, and completing recording and storing data. Such software is available from Innovative Aftermarket Systems, Inc. of Leander, Texas (assignee of the

subject patent application) under the SMART EYE trademark.

The business method involves installation of a digital video camera on a wall or other suitable location in the financial closing office(s) of a vehicle dealership, where the camera can record the images of all people in the office. The camera is connected, either directly or through a wireless connection, to a personal computer via a USB port. An audio microphone is also connected to the personal computer and is located in an area on the closing desk where it can record the voices of all people speaking in the office.

The CD-R, CD-RW, DVD-R, or DVD-RAM drive can either be internally installed or externally connected to the computer via USB.

The PC will have installed the customary hardware drivers for interfacing with the video camera and the aforementioned disk drives.

After the hardware and software installation is complete, use of the recording system is straightforward.

The software has clickable "buttons" which initiate a recording session, first by bringing up an on-screen form for

1 entering such items as the customer's name, address, vehicle
2 purchased, time, date, etc. for cataloging the to-be-generated
3 audio/video record of the transaction.

4 Once required fields in the on-screen form are complete,
5 a "CONTINUE" (or equivalent) clickable "button" initiates
6 actual recording. The digital images and audio stream,
7 respectively, from the video camera and the computer
8 microphone are recorded and stored into appropriate data files
9 as the transaction goes on. An on-screen "COMPLETE" (or
10 equivalent) clickable "button" terminates recording and stores
11 the final data file with database information onto the
12 designated storage media.

13 The subject system may be designed for two-stage storage:
14 a first stage which goes onto the computer's regular (albeit
15 high capacity) hard drive, followed by storage onto more
16 indelible optical media such as CD-R, DVD-R, or DVD-RAM disks,
17 with the DVD-R being of the highest capacity and most
18 indelible format known to date. At the time when the data
19 file is stored with the on-screen entered customer data, a
20 unique file number is assigned to it, and the customer data
21 and the file number is saved to a separate database for later
22 identification.

23 The just-mentioned database is one which will be

1 searchable as to any field in the original on-screen form. In
2 other words, one can search for all transactions on a
3 particular date, by a certain sales staff member, involving a
4 particular customer, or involving a particular vehicle or
5 product. Any retrieved record will reflect the data file
6 name(s) or number(s) in which these respective recorded
7 transactions are stored. Once having the file name(s) or
8 number(s), a user can retrieve the file(s) from the long-term
9 storage disk(s) according to the archiving system of the
10 dealership.

11 It should be noted that the on-screen data form can
12 easily be customized to gather and catalog any desired
13 information that a dealership would like to track or by which
14 the recorded data may be cataloged.

15 The subject business method allows for a permanent record
16 of what happened during the actual closing of vehicle purchase
17 transaction, supplementing the actual signed paperwork. This
18 permanent record can be used in the event any discrepancies or
19 disputes arise in the future regarding the transaction. This
20 record benefits and protects all parties to the transaction.

21 Having a permanent video/audio record of the actual
22 transaction helps ensure any written documents are not
23 misrepresented, misinterpreted, or improperly disclosed to the

1 customer.

2 Business management can monitor all transactions or spot
3 check transactions to ensure employee compliance with fair
4 business tactics and local, state, or federal laws.
5 Additionally, management can use the record to improve the
6 employee's ability to properly explain the transaction and/or
7 complex documents and agreements related to the transaction.

8 Although the invention has been described with reference
9 to specific embodiments, this description is not meant to be
10 construed in a limited sense. Various modifications of the
11 disclosed embodiments, as well as alternative embodiments of
12 the inventions will become apparent to persons skilled in the
13 art upon the reference to the description of the invention.
14 It is, therefore, contemplated that the appended claims will
15 cover such modifications that fall within the scope of the
16 invention.